

Impure

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Impure

“Purity.”

What does that mean?

I knew at three that my body wasn't it;

In fact, my body was inherently sinful and impure,

Only through the actions I took would I be able to redeem myself

And prove myself to God.

I needed to be purified.

When I was six, the feeling of a tangible hell terrified me.

I was told about the intangible feeling of lust that was to come and overcome my body

In the purity balls I attended with my father.

I promised myself, I promised my dad, and I promised God I would be pure.

I swore I would be pure before I could even understand what that meant.

My precious flower would belong to Daddy until

I married a man of faith, someone to make my indecency decent;¹

Someone who would ensure my flower never wilted.

¹ Thia Cooper, *Queer and indecent: An introduction to the theology of Marcella Althaus-Reid* (SCM Press, 2021), 99.

“If you aren’t a virgin, you will be giving a stem with no petals to your husband.”²

As I heard this, I internalized that women are of lower status, more dirty, and less pure³

Unless we have an intact hymen and keep it like that until marriage.

I was defined by my relationships with men: my father, my future husband,

And God was male too.

When I was twelve I was sure God hated me because

That dreadful, impure feeling finally started boiling up inside me.

I wanted to scream with the anxiety of carrying this sinful secret.

Galatians 5:17 “For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh.”⁴

My body did not belong to me, my body belonged to God.

I was taught to suppress my sexual desires and replace them with praise to the Lord.⁵

My flesh was impure but God wanted me to be pure. I *needed* to be pure.

I belonged to my father, I promised myself to him

And my mother was not to intervene in my purity;

She was a woman, she, too, was impure.

² Amanda Paul, "The Negative Implications of the Purity Movement on Young Women" (The Review: A Journal of Undergraduate Student Research 15, 2014), 10.

³ Breanne Fahs, "Daddy's Little Girls: On the Perils of Chastity Clubs, Purity Balls, and Ritualized Abstinence" (*Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 31, no. 3, 2010), 135.

⁴ Lauryn Leigh Estrada, "Clinical Considerations of the Evangelical Purity Movement's Impact on Female Sexuality" (*Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, 48:2, 2022), 123.

⁵ Paul, "The Negative Implications of the Purity Movement on Young Women," 16.

But at thirteen, she began talking to me.

She told me about the things I was to do to be wanted by men:

I was to shave my legs, but not wear short skirts,

I was to maintain a slim figure, but never show it off.

I was to be desirable, but never to desire,

And only within the appropriate margin.

This is purity.

At fifteen, I realized it was women who made me feel like this

It was my beautiful best friend, when I held her hand, when I thought about kissing her...

Why did God hate me? Why would he punish me with this?

I was to marry a man and only through the sacrament of marriage would I be pure

Because “sex is an incredible gift within the marriage covenant but it destroys the lives of those outside God’s plan.”⁶

Marriage can only occur between a man and a woman:

I was defined by my relationships with men;

This I knew.

At sixteen, I was reminded that women are the gatekeepers of men’s sexuality⁷

Men had urges and it was their nature to give in to them

But me, a woman, I was to be pure

I should not only control myself,

⁶ Fhas, “Daddy’s Little Girls,” 120.

⁷ Ligia Cruț, “I’m Taking Back My Body (The Female Body in the ‘Purity’ Culture)” (*Linguaculture (Iași)* 12, no. 1, 2021), 121.

But also him and his insatiable feelings.

I was simultaneously extremely powerful and completely powerless.⁸

With me, the heavy burden of the sinful secret feelings,
Feelings of want and desire, and all of these for women.

Worthless, impure,

Impure and worthless,

Impure,

I am not *pure*.

I am tainted.

I moved,

Got myself into school and away at eighteen.

Started sleeping with men,

Never did I want to

But I did it anyway because their masculine approval

Felt like the approval of God.

And no one seemed to care about what *I* wanted,

How *I* felt.

I didn't go back to church,

How could I?

⁸ Crut, "I'm Taking Back My Body," 121.

My purity was gone.

I was nothing without it.

At twenty, I took a course on Religion and Sexuality:

“Shame is a religiously conditioned reaction, and one must know that where there is shame, there is a system.”⁹

These words reverberated in my ears

How could I deconstruct and reconstruct who I have always been?

How could I not try?

At thirty,

I’m closer to God than ever:

I know She loves me.

And while I may not be *pure*,

I am faithful, and happy, and free.

What is “purity”

Anyways?

⁹ Cruț, “I’m Taking Back My Body,” 126.

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